



A KNOCKOUT SPA

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Gather the gang: it's half-term

You've two weeks to rustle up a week away. Chris Haslam's pick, from Mevagissey to the Seychelles, should help

Chris Haslam Published: 12 May 2013

360° tour: Escape to the New Forest for half-term (Sophie Morse/360cities.net)

Half-term week begins on May 26. Unless stated, prices are for a week, hotel stays are on a B&B basis, flights are from London and transfers are included. Contact the operator for regional departures

Britain

The sun came out and suddenly Cornwall looked lovely, prompting a flurry of bookings. "It left us at approximately 80% occupancy for May half term," says Julianne Shelton at Cornish Gems (0844 800 2813, cornishgems.com). The good news is that the remainder are available at a 20% discount. Overlooking the harbour at Mevagissey, the Moorings Lower Deck sleeps four and costs £791 for a week, based on four sharing.

For a Swallows and Amazons-style break, Pirates Den at Helford Passage is still available. Hire your dinghy on the beach, turn left for the open sea or right to explore upstream, then retire to the Ferryboat Inn for a pint of Proper Job. It sleeps four, and costs £825 with Holiday Cornwall (01326 250278, holidaycornwall.co.uk).

Across the peninsula, the Olde House (0844 770 0420, theoldehouse.co.uk) is part of a working farm at Chapel Amble, on the posh side of the River Camel. It has several smart self-catering cottages, and has knocked 10% off half-term rentals, with a two-bedroom cottage costing £945.

Elsewhere, Fiddlers Green is a two-bedroom apartment with sea views and a shared pool in Newquay — yours for £650 with Cornish Horizons (01841 533331, cornishhorizons.co.uk). Bay Retreat Villas (01637 839545, bayretreatvillas.co.uk) has knocked £200 off its stylish properties in St Merryn — you pay £750 for a blinged-up two-bed villa. And in the unlikely event that it rains, Classic Cottages (01326 555555, classic.co.uk) has a converted hay barn just two miles from the Eden Project, which has a packed programme of events. Little Resugga sleeps four at £846.

Devon is the place for the energetic family, where an action-packed five-day break with PGL (0844 371 2424, pgl.co.uk) at Barton Hall, outside Torquay, has been reduced from £996 to £719 for a family of four. The price includes archery, canoeing, mountain-biking, zip wires, ropes courses and raft building, as well as all meals and evening entertainment.

Or there's 25% off a week at the five-star Woodovis Park (01822 832968, woodovis.com), which is offering free foraging expeditions with the ecologist Ceri Richards. It costs £382, self-catering, for a holiday home sleeping up to six.

In **Dorset**, a family of up to six can have a week at Rockley, the poshest park in Haven's portfolio, for £329, saving £130 (0871 230 1900, haven.com). There's a spa complex, indoor and outdoor pools, a flume, a climbing wall and a sailing school on the beach.

Or you could send the kids to cycle school at Oakdene Forest Park, in the New Forest, **Hampshire**, where qualified instructors with all the latest kit will bring out their Miller Wiggins for £4 an hour. Then you can explore the forest on two wheels. Shorefield (01590 648331, shorefield)

four-berth caravan for £394, self-catering.

Too active? How about a week at 4mph? Waterways Holidays (01252 339023, waterwaysholidays.com) has knocked 10% off a week-long narrowboat holiday on the Grand Union Canal, starting and ending in Leighton Buzzard, **Bedfordshire**. It costs £1,040, saving £115, for a family of four including damage waiver, fuel, buoyancy aids and tuition.

Options in Wales include a five-day ordeal by water at Preseli Venture (01348 837709, preseliventure.co.uk) in **Pembrokeshire**, involving coastering, sea-kayaking and kite-boarding. It costs £525 for adults and £399 for under-16s; one child goes free with every family of four or more. The price includes five-star eco-lodge accommodation for four nights, all meals, guided adventure sessions and, crucially, winter wetsuits.

The loafers' option is a seaside bolt hole. Coastal Cottages of Pembrokeshire (01437 772760, coastalcottages.co.uk) has a few properties left, including Rock House, which sleeps six and lies yards from the foreshore of the Cleddau estuary. The views, predictably, are "stunning", and the price is £671, saving £118.

Cash poor and time poor? The four-star Vale Resort (01443 667800, vale-hotel.com), in Glamorgan, has a recession-busting deal including two nights' B&B in a family room, free dinners for the kids, organised activities and an indoor pool for £195.

In **Perthshire**, Wilderness Scotland (01479 420020, wildernessscotland.com) has a five-night bespoke guided trip with activities including gorge-walking, mountain-biking, open-boat canoeing, rock-climbing and nature walks. Highlight of the week is the barbecue and campfire on a wooded island, reached only by canoe. Accommodation is in a guesthouse and the price is £679 for adults and £479 for kids, including breakfasts and packed lunches.

France

For a cheap cross-Channel break, Sibilu Villages (0871 911 2288, sibilu.com) is offering free bike hire, free linen and 15% off accommodation at Domaine de Kerlann, near Quimper and arty Pont-Aven, in southern **Brittany**. A week in a self-catering mobile home starts at £328. It costs £125 for Dover-Calais ferry crossings with MyFerryLink (0844 248 2100, myferrylink.com).

Even cheaper is a break in a mobile home at the upmarket Camping Village Fayolan at Clairvaux-les-Lacs, in the **Jura**. It starts at £296, saving £130, including return crossings by ferry, with Venue Holidays (01233 629950, venueholidays.co.uk).

Nearer to home is the Mayenne river valley, south of **Caen**, where Normandy, Brittany and the Pays de Loire collide. Inntravel (01653 617000, inntravel.co.uk) has a family cycling week from £820 for adults and £450 for children, including six nights' half-board in gorgeous old manor houses (two with pools), return ferry crossings (though a £68 supplement applies during half term), luggage transfers, cycle hire, route notes and maps.

Mark Warner (0844 273 7397, markwarner.co.uk) has cut £300pp from a week's healthy exercise at the San Lucianu Beach Resort in **Corsica**, and added an upgrade to full-board. It costs £720 for adults and £522 for kids, including all the usual watersports, tennis and other instructed activities.

The Mediterranean

Casal dei Fichi is a self-catering farmhouse in the Italian **Marche** that's giving away free wine from its own vineyard. That's all we need to know, apart from the price: £635pp, with Real Holidays (020 7359 3938, realholidays.co.uk).

In **Greece**, Sunvil (020 8758 4758 sunvil.co.uk) has a week in the waterfront Hotel Armonia — it's close to the beach and has a pool — on Lefkas for £570pp. And in **Cyprus**, Thomas Cook (0844 412 5970, thomascook.com) has a week at the four-star Tsokkos Marlita Beach Hotel — an Aquamania resort — from £2,656, all-inclusive, for a family of four.

Prefer a more natural waterpark? Explore (0844 499 0901, explore.co.uk) has a week of whitewater rafting, sea-kayaking and canyoning in **Croatia** from £998 for adults and £941 for children aged eight and above, including most meals. Exodus (0845 863 9601, exodus.co.uk) is offering much the same on its Turquoise Coast Adventure, in **Turkey**, which starts at £649 per adult and £619 per child, including most meals.

Further afield

Dial a Flight (0844 556 6060, dialaflight.com) has the five-star Sheraton La Caleta Resort & Spa in **Tenerife** from £599pp. The hotel has three pools and four restaurants. Sunvil (020 8758 4722, sunvil.co.uk) has a family whale- and dolphin-watching week in the **Azores** from £533pp, staying at the Hotel Sao Miguel Park, in Ponta Delgada.

In **Egypt**, Hayes & Jarvis (0844 415 1918, hayesandjarvis.co.uk) has the Ritz-Carlton, Sharm el Sheikh from £799pp. The two kids' pools and the Ritz Kids programme will keep the children entertained while you loaf by one of the five pools or in the wellness centre.

In the **Seychelles**, which are at their best in May, Expert Africa (020 8232 9777, expertafrica.com) has the kid-friendly Coco de Mer, on Praslin, from £1,536 per adult and £1,043 per child, staying in a beach-facing chalet room and spending the days snorkelling, beachcombing and lounging in hammocks.

Still in the Indian Ocean, Elegant Resorts (01244 897538, elegantresorts.co.uk) is offering seven nights' half-board in a Junior Suite at the One & Only Le Saint Géran in **Mauritius** from £1,870 per adult and £830 per child — saving £2,995 for a family of four. Over in the Caribbean, Tropic Breeze (01752 880880, tropicbreeze.co.uk) has a posh week in a two-bedroom suite at Biras Creek Resort in the **British Virgin Islands** for £7,099, half-board, for a family of four — saving £1,750 on the brochure price.

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